

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
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B351 Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica*

Family: Corvidae Order: Passeriformes Class: Aves

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common resident in valleys and river bottoms east of the Cascade-Sierra crest from the Oregon border south to Olancha and Oasis, Inyo Co. Nests in and prefers valley foothill riparian habitat; also forages in adjacent grassland, wet meadow, pasture, cropland, sagebrush, and bitterbrush habitats, and along highways and at dumps (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Omnivorous and opportunistic. Feeds on insects, other invertebrates, carrion; less frequently on mice, bird eggs and young, snakes, fruits, seeds and grains, and practically anything edible it can find or capture. Gleans and hunts on ground, probes in earth, and occasionally gleans fruit from trees or hawks flying insects. Also picks ticks from backs of large mammals. Flocks may hunt grasshoppers cooperatively (Linsdale 1937, Bent 1946).

Cover: Dense riparian thickets and groves used for colonial roost sites.

Reproduction: Nests in sturdy, riparian tree, such as cottonwood. Builds nest in small, scattered colony in riparian grove along stream, or in planted deciduous tree near field or farmhouse. Large, bulky stick nest measures 0.6-0.9 m (2-3 ft) across. Base of nest held together with mud; usually roofed with dome of thorny twigs with hole in side for entrance to inner nest cup of rootlets, plant stems, horse hair. Nest placed 1-8 m (3-25 ft) above ground. Nest often used year after year (Bent 1946).

Water: Water always present within home range. Requires mud for nest construction.

Pattern: Prefers areas where riparian groves, thickets, or hedgerows of deciduous trees border meadows, pastures, or irrigated fields.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration. Yearlong, resident.

Home Range: No information found. In Idaho, Evenden (1947) reported 15 nests in 2 ha (5 ac).

Territory: Probably not territorial. In Wyoming, Erpino (1968) found no evidence of nest-related territoriality.

Reproduction: Height of egg-laying mid-April into early May. A monogamous, colonial nester. Clutch averages 7 eggs (range 5-13). Single-brooded; incubation period 16-18 days. Both sexes care for altricial young. Fledging age unknown (Bent 1946).

Niche: Most insectivorous corvid in North America (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

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